

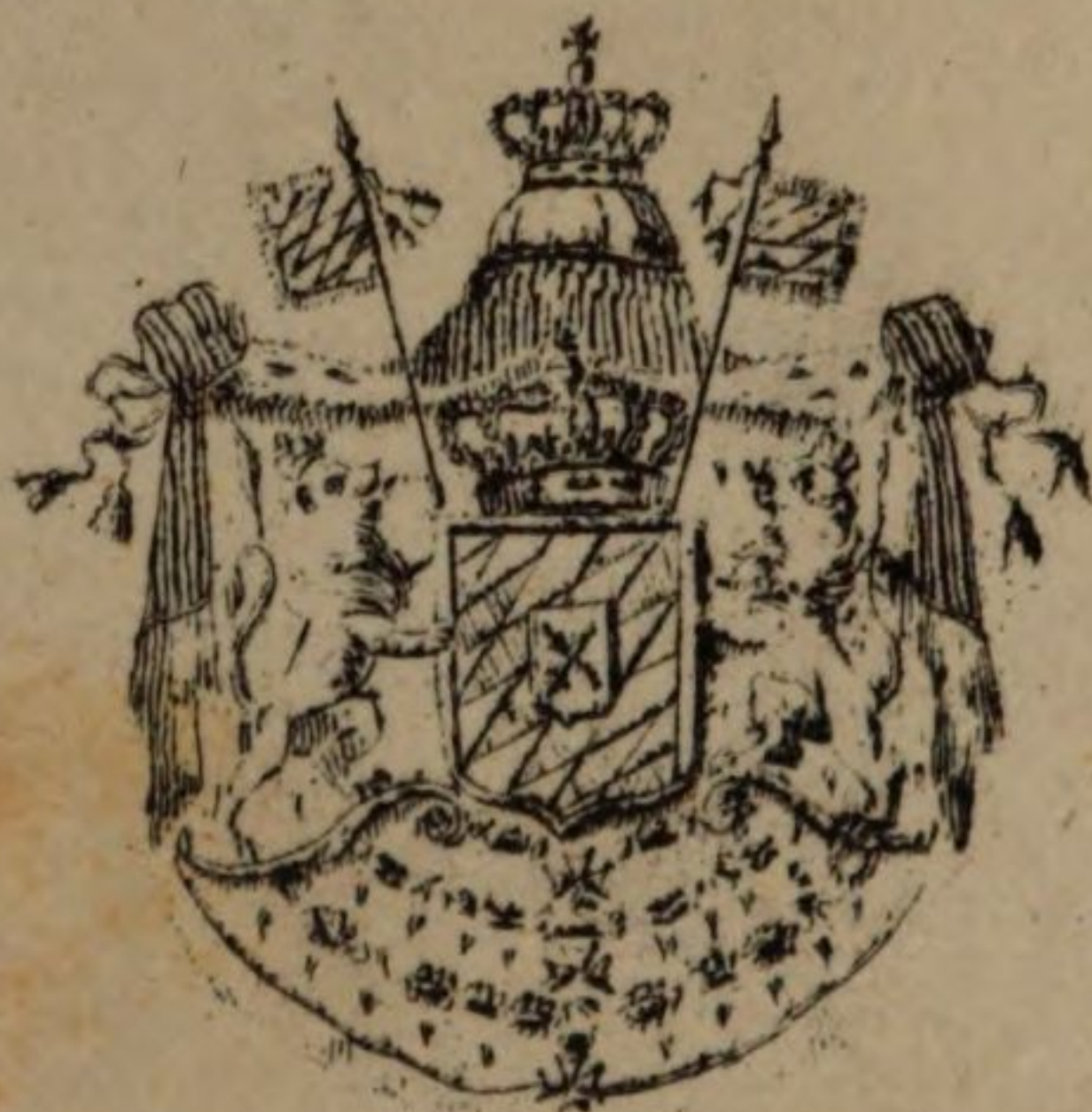
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THE HOUSE OF ASPEN.

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THE
HOUSE OF ASPEN,
A TRAGEDY.

BY SIR WALTER SCOTT.



PARIS:
PUBLISHED BY A. AND W. GALIGNANI,
AT THE ENGLISH, FRENCH, ITALIAN, GERMAN, AND SPANISH
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1830.

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1830



ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS attempt at dramatic composition was executed nearly thirty years since, when the magnificent works of Goëthé and Schiller were for the first time made known to the British public, and received, as many now alive must remember, with universal enthusiasm. What we admire we usually attempt to imitate; and the author, not trusting to his own efforts, borrowed the substance of the story and a part of the diction from a dramatic romance called «Die Heilige Vehmè» (the Secret Tribunal), which fills the sixth volume of the «Sagen den Vorzeit» (Tales of Antiquity), by Beit Weber. The drama must be termed rather a rifacimento of the original than a translation, since the whole is compressed, and the incidents and dialogue occasionally much varied. The imitator is ignorant of the real name of his ingenious con-

temporary, and has been informed that of Beit Weber is fictitious.

The late Mr John Kemble at one time had some desire to bring out the play at Drury-Lane, then adorned by himself and his matchless sister, who were to have supported the characters of the unhappy son and mother: but great objections appeared to this proposal. There was danger that the main spring of the story,—the binding engagements formed by members of the secret tribunal,—might not be sufficiently felt by an English audience, to whom the nature of that singularly mysterious institution was unknown from early association. There was also, according to Mr Kemble's experienced opinion, too much blood, too much of the dire catastrophe of Tom Thumb, when all die on the stage. It was besides esteemed perilous to place the fifth act and the parade and show of the secret conclave, at the mercy of underlings and scene-shifters, who, by a ridiculous motion, gesture, or accent, might turn what should be grave into farce.

The author, or rather the translator, willingly acquiesced in this reasoning, and never afterwards made any attempt to gain the honour of the buskin. The German taste also,

caricatured by a number of imitators, who, incapable of copying the sublimity of the great masters of the school, supplied its place by extravagance and bombast, fell into disrepute, and received a *coup de grace* from the joint efforts of the late lamented Mr Canning and Mr Frere. The effect of their singularly happy piece of ridicule called "The Rovers," a mock play which appeared in the *Anti-Jacobin*, was, that the German school, with its beauties and its defects, passed completely out of fashion, and the following scenes were consigned to neglect and obscurity. Very lately, however, the writer chanced to look them over with feelings very different from those of the adventurous period of his literary life, during which they had been written, and yet with such as perhaps a reformed libertine might regard the illegitimate production of an early amour. There is something to be ashamed of, certainly; but, after all, paternal vanity whispers that the child has a resemblance to the father.

To this it need only be added, that there are in existence so many manuscript copies of the following play, that if it should not find its way to the public sooner, it is certain to do so when

the author can no more have any opportunity of correcting the press, and consequently at greater disadvantage than at present. Being of too small a size or consequence for a separate publication, the piece is sent as a contribution to the Keepsake, where its demerits may be hidden amid the beauties of more valuable articles.

Abbotsford, 1st of April.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MEN.

RUDIGER, *Baron of Aspen, an old German warrior.*

GEORGE OF ASPEN, }
HENRY OF ASPEN, } *sons to Rudiger.*

RODERIC, *Count of Maltingen, chief of a department of the Invisible Tribunal, and the hereditary enemy of the family of Aspen.*

WILLIAM, *Baron of Wolfstein, ally of Count Roderic.*

BERTRAM OF EBERSDORF, *brother to the former husband of the Baroness of Aspen, disguised as a minstrel.*

DUKE OF BAVARIA.

WICKERD, }
REYNOLD, } *followers of the house of Aspen.*

CONRAD, *Page of Honour to Henry of Aspen.*

MARTIN, *Squire to George of Aspen.*

HUGO, *Squire to Count Roderic.*

PETER, *an ancient domestic of Rudiger.*

FATHER LUDOVIC, *Chaplain to Rudiger.*

WOMEN.

ISABELLA, *formerly married to Arnolf of Ebersdorf, now wife of Rudiger.*

GERTRUDE, *Isabella's niece, betrothed to Henry.*

Soldiers, Judges of the Invisible Tribunal, etc. etc.

Scene — The Castle of Ebersdorf in Bavaria, the ruins of Griefenhaus, and the adjacent country.

DRAMATIS PERSONA

HERBERT, Baron of Aspen, an old German warrior.
GEORGE OF ASPEN, his son.
HENRY OF ASPEN, his son.
HENRIK, Count of Helsing, chief of a department
of the Swedish Tribunal, and the ordinary enemy
of the family of Aspen.
WILLIAM, Baron of Helsing, ally of Count Henric.
HELMUTH OF Helsing, brother to the former but
lord of the Honour of Aspen, disguised as a

Baron of Helsing.

WILHELM, follower of the house of Aspen.
HENRIK, follower of the house of Aspen.

GEORGE, Page of Honour to Henry of Aspen.

ALFRED, friend to George of Aspen.

HELMUTH, friend to Count Henric.

PETER, an ancient domestic of Henric.

BARBARA, daughter of Henric.

WOMEN.

BARBARA, formerly married to Alfred of Helsing.

HERBERT, friend of Henric.

GEORGE, friend of Henric, betrothed to Henry.

ALFRED, friend of the Swedish Tribunal, etc. etc.

GEORGE - The Count of Helsing in Helsing, the ruler

of Helsing, and the ancient country.

THE HOUSE OF ASPEN.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

*An ancient gothic chamber in the castle of Ebersdorf.
Spears, cross-bows, and arms, with the horns of
buffaloes and of deer, are hung round the wall.
An antique buffet with beakers and stone bottles.*

RUDIGER, *Baron of Aspen*, and his lady, ISABELLA,
are discovered sitting at a large oaken table.

RUDIGER.

A plague upon that roan horse! Had he not
stumbled with me at the ford after our last skir-
mish, I had been now with my sons. And yonder
the boys are, hardly three miles off, battling with
Count Roderic; and their father must lie here like
a worm-eaten manuscript in a convent library!
Out upon it! Out upon it! Is it not hard that a
warrior, who has travelled so many leagues to

display the cross on the walls of Zion, should be now unable to lift a spear before his own castle gate?

ISABELLA.

Dear husband, your anxiety retards your recovery.

RUDIGER.

May be so; but not less than your silence and melancholy! Here have I sate this month, and more, since that cursed fall! Neither hunting, nor feasting, nor lance-breaking for me! And my sons—George enters cold and reserved as if he had the weight of the empire on his shoulders, utters by syllables a cold “How is it with you?” and shuts himself up for days in his solitary chamber—Henry, my cheerful Henry—

ISABELLA.

Surely, he at least—

RUDIGER.

Even he forsakes me, and skips up the tower staircase like lightning to join your fair ward, Gertrude, on the battlements. I cannot blame him; for by my knightly faith, were I in his place, I think even these bruised bones would hardly keep me from her side. Still, however, here I must sit alone.

ISABELLA.

Not alone, dear husband. Heaven knows what I would do to soften your confinement.

RUDIGER.

Tell me not of that, lady. When I first knew thee, Isabella, the fair maid of Arnheim was the

joy of her companions, and breathed life wherever she came. Thy father married thee to Arnolf of Ebersdorf—not much with thy will, 't is true—(*she hides her face.*) Nay—forgive me, Isabella—but that is over—he died, and the ties between us, which thy marriage had broken, were renewed—but the sunshine of my Isabella's light heart returned no more.

ISABELLA (*weeping*).

Beloved Rudiger, you search my very soul! Why will you recall past times—days of spring that can never return? Do I not love thee more than ever wife loved husband?

RUDIGER (*stretches out his arms—she embraces him*).

And therefore art thou ever my beloved Isabella. But still, is it not true? Has not thy cheerfulness vanished since thou hast become Lady of Aspen? Dost thou repent of thy love to Rudiger?

ISABELLA.

Alas! no! never! never!

RUDIGER.

Then why dost thou herd with monks and priests, and leave thy old knight alone, when, for the first time in his stormy life, he has rested for weeks within the walls of his castle? Hast thou committed a crime from which Rudiger's love cannot absolve thee?

ISABELLA.

O many! many!

RUDIGER.

Then be this kiss thy penance. And tell me, Isabella, hast thou not founded a convent, and

endowed it with the best of thy late husband's lands? Ay, and with a vineyard which I could have prized as well as the sleek monks. Dost thou not daily distribute alms to twenty pilgrims? Dost thou not cause ten masses to be sung each night for the repose of thy late husband's soul?

ISABELLA.

It will not know repose.

RUDIGER.

Well, well—God's peace be with Arnolf of Ebersdorf; the mention of him makes thee ever sad, though so many years have passed since his death.

ISABELLA.

But at present, dear husband, have I not the most just cause for anxiety? Are not Henry and George, our beloved sons, at this very moment perhaps engaged in doubtful contest with our hereditary foe, Count Roderic of Maltingen?

RUDIGER.

Now, there lies the difference: you sorrow that they are in danger, I that I cannot share it with them.—Hark! I hear horses' feet on the draw-bridge. Go to the window, Isabella.

ISABELLA (*at the window*).

It is Wickerd, your squire.

RUDIGER.

Then shall we have tidings of George and Henry.

Enter WICKERD.

How now, Wickerd? Have you come to blows yet?

WICKERD.

Not yet, noble sir.

RUDIGER.

Not yet?—shame on the boys' dallying—what wait they for?

WICKERD.

The foe is strongly posted, sir knight, upon the Wolfshill, near the ruins of Griefenhaus; therefore your noble son, George of Aspen, greets you well, and requests twenty more men-at-arms, and, after they have joined him, he hopes, with the aid of St Theodore, to send you news of victory.

RUDIGER (*attempts to rise hastily*).

Saddle my black barb; I will head them myself. (*Sits down.*) A murrain on that stumbling roan! I had forgot my dislocated bones. Call Reynold, Wickerd, and bid him take all whom he can spare from defence of the castle—(*WICKERD is going*)—and ho! Wickerd, carry with you my black barb, and bid George charge upon him—[*Exit WICKERD.*] Now see, Isabel, if I disregard the boy's safety; I send him the best horse ever knight bestrode. When we lay before Ascalon, indeed, I had a bright bay Persian—Thou dost not heed me.

ISABELLA.

Forgive me, dear husband; are not our sons in danger? Will not our sins be visited upon them? Is not their present situation—

RUDIGER.

Situation? I know it well: as fair a field for open fight as I ever hunted over: see here—(*makes lines on the table*)—here is the ancient castle of

Griefenhaus in ruins, here the Wolfshill; and here the marsh on the right.

ISABELLA.

The marsh of Griefenhaus!

RUDIGER.

Yes; by that the boys must pass.

ISABELLA.

Pass there! (*Apart.*) Avenging Heaven! thy hand is upon us! [*Exit hastily.*]

RUDIGER.

Whither now? Whither now? She is gone. Thus it goes. Peter! Peter!—

Enter PETER.

Help me to the gallery, that I may see them on horseback. [*Exit, leaning on* PETER.]

SCENE II.

The inner court of the castle of Ebersdorf; a quadrangle, surrounded with Gothic buildings; troopers, followers of RUDIGER, *pass and repass in haste, as if preparing for an excursion.*

WICKERD *comes forward.*

WICKERD.

What, ho! Reynold! Reynold!—By our Lady, the spirit of the Seven Sleepers is upon him—So ho! not mounted yet? Reynold!

Enter REYNOLD.

REYNOLD.

Here! here! A devil choke thy bawling! think'st thou old Reynold is not as ready for a skirmish as thou?

WICKERD.

Nay, nay; I did but jest; but, by my sooth, it were a shame should our youngsters have yoked with Count Roderic before we greybeards come.

REYNOLD.

Heaven forefend! Our troopers are but saddling their horses; five minutes more, and we are in our stirrups, and then let Count Roderic sit fast.

WICKERD.

A plague on him! he has ever lain hard on the skirts of our noble master.

REYNOLD.

Especially since he was refused the hand of our lady's niece, the pretty Lady Gertrude.

WICKERD.

Ay, marry! would nothing less serve the fox of Maltingen than the lovely lamb of our young Baron Henry! By my sooth, Reynold, when I look upon these two lovers, they make me full twenty years younger; and when I meet the man that would divide them—I say nothing—but let him look to it.

REYNOLD.

And how fare our young lords?

WICKERD.

Each well in his humour.—Baron George stern

and cold, according to his wont, and his brother as cheerful as ever.

REYNOLD.

Well!—Baron Henry for me.

WICKERD.

Yet George saved thy life.

REYNOLD.

True—with as much indifference as if he had been snatching a chestnut out of the fire. Now Baron Henry wept for my danger and my wounds. Therefore George shall ever command my life, but Henry my love.

WICKERD.

Nay, Baron George shows his gloomy spirit even by the choice of a favourite.

REYNOLD.

Ay—Martin, formerly the squire of Arnolf of Ebersdorf, his mother's first husband.—I marvel he could not have fitted himself with an attendant from among the faithful followers of his worthy father, whom Arnolf and his adherents used to hate as the Devil hates holy water. But Martin is a good soldier, and has stood toughly by George in many a hard brunt.

WICKERD.

The knave is sturdy enough, but so sulky withal—I have seen, brother Reynold, that when Martin showed his moody visage at the banquet, our noble mistress has dropped the wine she was raising to her lips, and exchanged her smiles for a ghastly frown, as if sorrow went by sympathy, as kissing goes by favour.

REYNOLD.

His appearance reminds her of her first husband, and thou hast well seen *that* makes her ever sad.

WICKERD.

Dost thou marvel at that? She was married to Arnold by a species of force, and they say that before his death he compelled her to swear never to espouse Rudiger. The priests will not absolve her for the breach of that vow, and therefore she is troubled in mind. For, d'ye mark me, Reynold— [Bugle sounds.

REYNOLD.

A truce to your preaching! To horse! and a blessing on our arms!

WICKERD.

St George grant it! [Exeunt.

SCENE III.

The gallery of the castle, terminating in a large balcony commanding a distant prospect.—Voices, bugle horns, kettle-drums, trampling of horses, etc. are heard without.

RUDIGER, leaning on PETER, looks from the balcony.
—GERTRUDE and ISABELLA are near him.

RUDIGER.

There they go at length—look, Isabella! look,

my pretty Gertrude—these are the iron-handed warriors who shall tell Roderic what it will cost him to force thee from my protection—(*Flourish without, RUDIGER stretches his arms from the balcony.*) Go, my children, and God's blessing with you. Look at my black barb, Gertrude. That horse shall let daylight in through a phalanx, were it twenty pikes deep. Shame on it that I cannot mount him! Seest thou how fierce old Reynold looks?

GERTRUDE.

I can hardly know my friends in their armour.

[*The bugle and kettle-drums are heard as at a greater distance.*]

RUDIGER.

Now I could tell every one of their names, even at this distance; ay, and were they covered, as I have seen them, with dust and blood. He on the dapple-grey is Wickerd—a hardy fellow, but somewhat given to prating. That is young Conrad who gallops so fast, page to thy Henry, my girl.

[*Bugles, etc. at a greater distance still.*]

GERTRUDE.

Heaven guard them. Alas! the voice of war, that calls the blood into your cheeks, chills and freezes mine.

RUDIGER.

Say not so. It is glorious, my girl, glorious! See how their armour glistens as they wind round yon hill! how their spears glimmer amid the long train of dust. Hark! you can still hear the faint notes of their trumpets—(*Bugles very faint.*)—And

Rudiger, old Rudiger with the iron arm, as the crusaders used to call me, must remain behind with the priests and the women. Well! well!—
(*Sings.*)

It was a knight to battle rode,
And as his war-horse he bestrode—

Fill me a bowl of wine, Gertrude; and do thou, Peter, call the minstrel who came hither last night—(*Sings.*)

Off rode the horseman, dash, sa, sa!
And stroked his whiskers, tra, la, la.—

[*PETER goes out.—RUDIGER sits down, and GERTRUDE helps him with wine.*]

Thanks, my love. It tastes ever best from thy hand. Isabella, here is glory and victory to our boys—(*Drinks.*) Wilt thou not pledge me?

ISABELLA.

To their safety, and God grant it!—(*Drinks.*)

Enter BERTRAM as a minstrel, with a Boy bearing his harp.—Also PETER.

RUDIGER.

Thy name, minstrel?

BERTRAM.

Minhold, so please you.

RUDIGER.

Art thou a German?

BERTRAM.

Yes, noble sir; and of this province.

RUDIGER.

Sing me a song of battle.

[BERTRAM *sings to the harp.*

RUDIGER.

Thanks, minstrel : well sung and lustily. What sayst thou, Isabella?

ISABELLA.

I marked him not.

RUDIGER.

Nay, in sooth you are too anxious. Cheer up. And thou, too, my lovely Gertrude : in a few hours thy Henry shall return, and twine his laurels into a garland for thy hair. He fights for thee, and he must conquer.

GERTRUDE.

Alas ! must blood be spilled for a silly maiden?

RUDIGER.

Surely : for what should knights break lances, but for honour and ladies' love—ha, minstrel?

BERTRAM.

So please you—also to punish crimes.

RUDIGER.

Out upon it ! wouldst have us executioners, minstrel ? Such work would disgrace our blades. We leave malefactors to the Secret Tribunal.

ISABELLA.

Merciful God ! Thou hast spoken a word, Rudiger, of dreadful import.

GERTRUDE.

They say that, unknown and invisible themselves, these awful judges are ever present with the guilty ; that the past and the present misdeeds,

the secrets of the confessional, nay, the very thoughts of the heart, are before them; that their doom is as sure as that of fate, the means and executioners unknown.

RUDIGER.

They say true—the secrets of that association, and the names of those who compose it, are as inscrutable as the grave: we only know that it has taken deep root, and spread its branches wide. I sit down each day in my hall, nor know I how many of these secret judges may surround me, all bound by the most solemn vow to avenge guilt. Once, and but once, a knight, at the earnest request and inquiries of the emperor, hinted that he belonged to the society; the next morning he was found slain in a forest: the poniard was left in the wound, and bore this label—"Thus do the invisible judges punish treachery."

GERTRUDE.

Gracious! aunt, you grow pale.

ISABELLA.

A slight indisposition only.

RUDIGER.

And what of it all? We know our hearts are open to our Creator: shall we fear any earthly inspection! Come to the battlements; there we shall soonest descry the return of our warriors.

[*Exit* RUDIGER, with GERTRUDE and PETER.

ISABELLA.

Minstrel, send the chaplain hither. (*Exit* BERTRAM.) Gracious Heaven! the guileless innocence of my niece, the manly honesty of my upright-

hearted Rudiger, become daily tortures to me. While he was engaged in active and stormy exploits, fear for his safety, joy when he returned to his castle, enabled me to disguise my inward anguish from others. But from myself—Judges of blood, that lie concealed in noontide as in midnight, who boast to avenge the hidden guilt, and to penetrate the recesses of the human breast, how blind is your penetration, how vain your dagger and your cord, compared to the conscience of the sinner!

Enter FATHER LUDOVIC.

LUDOVIC.

Peace be with you, lady!

ISABELLA.

It is not with me : it is thy office to bring it.

LUDOVIC.

And the cause is the absence of the young knights?

ISABELLA.

Their absence and their danger.

LUDOVIC.

Daughter, thy hand has been stretched out in bounty to the sick and to the needy. Thou hast not denied a shelter to the weary, nor a tear to the afflicted. Trust in their prayers, and in those of the holy convent thou hast founded; peradventure they will bring back thy children to thy bosom.

ISABELLA.

Thy brethren cannot pray for me or mine.

Their vow binds them to pray night and day for another—to supplicate, without ceasing, the Eternal Mercy for the soul of one who—O, only Heaven knows how much he needs their prayer!

LUDOVIC.

Unbounded is the mercy of Heaven. The soul of thy former husband—

ISABELLA.

I charge thee, priest, mention not the word. (*Apart.*) Wretch that I am, the meanest menial in my train has power to goad me to madness!

LUDOVIC.

Hearken to me, daughter; thy crime against Arnolf of Ebersdorf cannot bear in the eye of Heaven so deep a dye of guilt.

ISABELLA.

Repeat that once more; say once again that it cannot—cannot bear so deep a dye. Prove to me that ages of the bitterest penance, that tears of the dearest blood, can erase such guilt. Prove but *that* to me, and I will build thee an abbey which shall put to shame the fairest fane in Christendom.

LUDOVIC.

Nay, nay, daughter, your conscience is over tender. Supposing that, under dread of the stern Arnolf, you swore never to marry your present husband, still the exacting such an oath was unlawful, and the breach of it venial.

ISABELLA (*resuming her composure*).

Be it so, good father; I yield to thy better rea-

sons. And now tell me, has thy pious care achieved the task I intrusted to thee?

LUDOVIC.

Of superintending the erection of thy new hospital for pilgrims? I have, noble lady: and last night the minstrel now in the castle lodged there.

ISABELLA.

Wherefore came he then to the castle?

LUDOVIC.

Reynold brought the commands of the baron.

ISABELLA.

Whence comes he, and what is his tale? When he sung before Rudiger, I thought that long before I had heard such tones—seen such a face.

LUDOVIC.

It is possible you may have seen him, lady, for he boasts to have been known to Arnolf of Ebersdorf, and to have lived formerly in this castle. He inquires much after *Martin*, Arnolf's squire.

ISABELLA.

Go, Ludovic—go quick, good father, seek him out, give him this purse, and bid him leave the castle, and speed him on his way.

LUDOVIC.

May I ask why, noble lady?

ISABELLA.

Thou art inquisitive, priest: I honour the servants of God, but I foster not the prying spirit of a monk. Begone!

LUDOVIC.

But the baron, lady, will expect a reason why I dismiss his guest.

ISABELLA.

True, true (*recollecting herself*); pardon my warmth, good father, I was thinking of the cuckoo that grows too big for the nest of the sparrow, and strangles its foster-mother. Do no such birds roost in convent walls?

LUDOVIC.

Lady, I understand you not.

ISABELLA.

Well, then, say to the baron, that I have dismissed long ago all the attendants of the man of whom thou hast spoken, and that I wish to have none of them beneath my roof.

LUDOVIC (*inquisitively*).

Except Martin?

ISABELLA (*sharply*).

Except Martin! who saved the life of my son George? Do as I command thee! [*Exit.*

Manet LUDOVIC.

LUDOVIC.

Ever the same—stern and peremptory to others as rigorous to herself; haughty even to me, to whom, in another mood, she has knelt for absolution, and whose knees she has bathed in tears. I cannot fathom her. The unnatural zeal with which she performs her dreadful penances cannot be religion, for shrewdly I guess she believes not in their blessed efficacy. Well for her that she is the foundress of our convent, otherwise we might not have erred in denouncing her as a heretic! [*Exit.*

ACT II.

SCENE I.

A woodland prospect.—Through a long avenue, half grown up by brambles, are discerned in the back ground the ruins of the ancient castle of Griefenhaus.—The distant noise of battle is heard during this scene.

Enter GEORGE OF ASPEN, armed with a battle-axe in his hand, as from horseback. He supports MARTIN, and brings him forward.

GEORGE.

Lay thee down here, old friend. The enemy's horsemen will hardly take their way among these brambles, through which I have dragged thee.

MARTIN.

Oh, do not leave me! leave me not a moment! My moments are now but few, and I would profit by them.

GEORGE.

Martin, you forget yourself and me—I must back to the field.

MARTIN (*attempts to rise*).

Then drag me back thither also; I cannot die but in your presence—I dare not be alone. Stay, to give peace to my parting soul.

GEORGE.

I am no priest, Martin. (*Going.*)

MARTIN (*raising himself with great pain*).

Baron George of Aspen, I saved thy life in battle: for that good deed, hear me but one moment.

GEORGE.

I hear thee, my poor friend. (*Returning.*)

MARTIN.

But come close—very close. See'st thou, sir knight—this wound I bore for thee—and this—and this—dost thou not remember?

GEORGE.

I do.

MARTIN.

I have served thee since thou wast a child; served thee faithfully—was never from thy side.

GEORGE.

Thou hast.

MARTIN.

And now I die in thy service.

GEORGE.

Thou mayst recover.

MARTIN.

I cannot. By my long services—by my scars—by this mortal gash, and by the death that I am to die—oh, do not hate me for what I am now to unfold!

GEORGE.

Be assured I can never hate thee.

MARTIN.

Ah! thou little knowest—Swear to me thou wilt speak a word of comfort to my parting soul.

GEORGE (*takes his hand*).

I swear I will. (*Alarm and shouting.*) But be brief—thou knowest my haste.

MARTIN.

Hear me, then. I was the squire, the beloved and favourite attendant, of Arnolf of Ebersdorf. Arnolf was savage as the mountain bear. He loved the Lady Isabel, but she requited not his passion. She loved thy father; but her sire, old Arnheim, was the friend of Arnolf, and she was forced to marry him. By midnight, in the chapel at Ebersdorf, the ill-omened rites were performed; her resistance, her screams were in vain. These arms detained her at the altar till the nuptial benediction was pronounced. Canst thou forgive me?

GEORGE.

I do forgive thee. Thy obedience to thy savage master has been obliterated by a long train of services to his widow.

MARTIN.

Services! ay, bloody services! for they commenced—do not quit my hand—they commenced with the murder of my master! (*GEORGE quits his hand, and stands aghast in speechless horror.*) Trample on me! pursue me with your dagger! I aided your mother to poison her first husband! I thank Heaven, it is said.

GEORGE.

My mother? Sacred Heaven! Martin, thou ravest—the fever of thy wound has distracted thee.

MARTIN.

No! I am not mad! Would to God I were! Try me! Yonder is the Wolfshill—yonder the old castle of Griefenhaus—and yonder is the hemlock marsh (*in a whisper*) where I gathered the deadly plant that drugged Arnolf's cup of death. (GEORGE traverses the stage in the utmost agitation, and sometimes stands over MARTIN with his hands clasped together.) Oh, had you seen him when the potion took effect! Had you heard his ravings, and seen the contortions of his ghastly visage!—He died furious and impenitent, as he lived; and went—where I am shortly to go. You do not speak?

GEORGE (*with exertion*).

Miserable wretch! how can I?

MARTIN.

Can you not forgive me?

GEORGE.

May God pardon thee—I cannot!

MARTIN.

I saved thy life—

GEORGE.

For that, take my curse! (*He snatches up his battle-axe, and rushes out to the side from which the noise is heard.*)

MARTIN.

Hear me! yet more—more horror! (*Attempts to rise, and falls heavily. A loud alarm.*)

Enter WICKERD, hastily.

WICKERD.

In the name of God, Martin, lend me thy brand!

MARTIN.

Take it.

WICKERD.

Where is it?

MARTIN (*looks wildly at him*).

In the chapel at Ebersdorf, or buried in the hemlock marsh.

WICKERD.

The old grumbler is crazy with his wounds. Martin, if thou hast a spark of reason in thee, give me thy sword. The day goes sore against us.

MARTIN.

There it lies. Bury it in the heart of thy master George; thou wilt do him a good office—the office of a faithful servant.

Enter CONRAD.

CONRAD.

Away, Wickerd! to horse, and pursue! Baron George has turned the day; he fights more like a fiend than a man: he has unhorsed Roderic, and slain six of his troopers—they are in headlong flight—the hemlock marsh is red with their gore! (MARTIN gives a deep groan, and faints.) Away! away! (*They hurry off, as to the pursuit.*)

Enter RODERIC OF MALTINGEN, without his helmet, his arms disordered and broken, holding the truncheon of a spear in his hand; with him, BARON WOLFSTEIN.

RODERIC.

A curse on fortune, and a double curse upon George of Aspen! Never, never will I forgive him my disgrace—overthrown like a rotten trunk before a whirlwind!

WOLFSTEIN.

Be comforted, Count Roderic; it is well we have escaped being prisoners. See how the troopers of Aspen pour along the plain, like the billows of the Rhine! It is good we are shrouded by the thicket.

RODERIC.

Why took he not my life, when he robbed me of my honour and of my love? Why did his spear not pierce my heart, when mine shivered on his arms like a frail bulrush? (*Throws down the broken spear.*) Bear witness, Heaven and earth, I outlive this disgrace only to avenge!

WOLFSTEIN.

Be comforted; the knights of Aspen have not gained a bloodless victory. And see, there lies one of George's followers—(*seeing MARTIN.*)

RODERIC.

His squire Martin; if he be not dead, we will secure him: he is the depositary of the secrets of his master. Arouse thee, trusty follower of the house of Aspen!

MARTIN (*reviving*).

Leave me not! leave me not, Baron George!
My eyes are darkened with agony! I have not yet
told all.

WOLFSTEIN.

The old man takes you for his master.

RODERIC.

What wouldst thou tell?

MARTIN.

Oh, I would tell all the temptations by which
I was urged to the murder of Ebersdorf!

RODERIC.

Murder!—this is worth marking. Proceed.

MARTIN.

I loved a maiden daughter of Arnolf's steward;
my master seduced her—she became an outcast,
and died in misery—I vowed vengeance—and I
did avenge her.

RODERIC.

Hadst thou accomplices?

MARTIN.

None, but thy mother.

RODERIC.

The Lady Isabella!

MARTIN.

Ay: she hated her husband: he knew her love
to Rudiger, and when she heard that thy father
was returned from Palestine, her life was endan-
gered by the transports of his jealousy—thus pre-
pared for evil, the fiend tempted us, and we fell.

RODERIC (*breaks into a transport*).

Fortune! thou hast repaid me all! Love and

vengeance are my own!—Wolfstein, recall our followers! quick, sound thy bugle—(WOLFSTEIN sounds.)

MARTIN (*stares wildly round*).

That was no note of Aspen—Count Roderic of Maltingen—Heaven! what have I said!

RODERIC.

What thou canst not recall.

MARTIN.

Then is my fate decreed! 'T is as it should be! in this very place was the poison gathered—'t is retribution!

Enter three or four soldiers of RODERIC.

RODERIC.

Secure this wounded trooper; bind his wounds, and guard him well: carry him to the ruins of Griefenhaus, and conceal him till the troopers of Aspen have retired from the pursuit;—look to him, as you love your lives.

MARTIN (*led off by soldiers*).

Ministers of vengeance! my hour is come!
[*Exeunt.*]

RODERIC.

Hope, joy, and triumph, once again are ye mine! Welcome to my heart, long-absent visitants! One lucky chance has thrown dominion into the scale of the house of Maltingen, and Aspen kicks the beam.

WOLFSTEIN.

I foresee, indeed, dishonour to the family of

Aspen, should this wounded squire make good his tale.

RODERIC.

And how thinkest thou this disgrace will fall on them?

WOLFSTEIN.

Surely, by the public punishment of Lady Isabella.

RODERIC.

And is that all?

WOLFSTEIN.

What more?

RODERIC.

Short-sighted that thou art, is not George of Aspen, as well as thou, a member of the holy and invisible circle, over which I preside?

WOLFSTEIN.

Speak lower, for God's sake! these are things not to be mentioned before the sun.

RODERIC.

True: but stands he not bound by the most solemn oath religion can devise, to discover to the tribunal whatever concealed iniquity shall come to his knowledge, be the perpetrator whom he may—ay, were that perpetrator his own father—or mother; and can you doubt that he has heard Martin's confession?

WOLFSTEIN.

True: but, blessed Virgin! do you think he will accuse his own mother before the invisible judges?

RODERIC.

If not, he becomes forsworn, and, by our law, must die. Either way my vengeance is complete—perjured or parricide, I care not; but, as the one or the other, shall I crush the haughty George of Aspen.

WOLFSTEIN.

Thy vengeance strikes deep.

RODERIC.

Deep as the wounds I have borne from this proud family. Rudiger slew my father in battle—George has twice baffled and dishonoured my arms, and Henry has stolen the heart of my beloved: but no longer can Gertrude now remain under the care of the murderous dam of this brood of wolves; far less can she wed the smooth-cheeked boy, when this scene of villany shall be disclosed. [*Bugle.*

WOLFSTEIN.

Hark! they sound a retreat: let us go deeper into the wood.

RODERIC.

The victors approach! I shall dash their triumph!—Issue the private summons for convoking the members this very evening; I will direct the other measures.

WOLFSTEIN.

What place?

RODERIC.

The old chapel in the ruins of Griefenhaus, as usual. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

Enter GEORGE OF ASPEN, as from the pursuit.

GEORGE (*comes slowly forward*).

How many wretches have sunk under my arm this day, to whom life was sweet, though the wretched bondsmen of Count Roderic! And I—I who sought death beneath every lifted battle-axe, and offered my breast to every arrow—I am cursed with victory and safety. Here I left the wretch——Martin!—Martin!—what, ho! Martin!——Mother of God! he is gone! Should he repeat the dreadful tale to any other——Martin!—He answers not. Perhaps he has crept into the thicket, and died there—were it so, the horrible secret is only mine.

Enter HENRY OF ASPEN, with WICKERD, REYNOLD, and followers.

HENRY.

Joy to thee, brother! though, by St Francis, I would not gain another field at the price of seeing thee fight with such reckless desperation. Thy safety is little less than miraculous.

REYNOLD.

By'r Lady, when Baron George struck, I think he must have forgot that his foes were God's creatures. Such furious doings I never saw, and I have

been a trooper these forty-two years come St Barnaby.

GEORGE.

Peace! Saw any of you Martin?

WICKERD.

Noble sir, I left him here not long since.

GEORGE.

Alive, or dead?

WICKERD.

Alive, noble sir, but sorely wounded. I think he must be prisoner, for he could not have budged else from hence.

GEORGE.

Heedless slave! Why didst thou leave him?

HENRY.

Dear brother, Wickerd acted for the best: he came to our assistance and the aid of his companions.

GEORGE.

I tell thee, Henry, Martin's safety was of more importance than the lives of any ten that stand here.

WICKERD (*muttering*).

Here's much to do about an old crazy trencher-shifter.

GEORGE.

What mutterest thou?

WICKERD.

Only, sir knight, that Martin seemed out of his senses when I left him, and has perhaps wandered into the marsh, and perished there.

GEORGE.

How—out of his senses? Did he speak to thee?
—(*apprehensively.*)

WICKERD.

Yes, noble sir.

GEORGE.

Dear Henry, step for an instant to yon tree—
thou wilt see from thence if the foe rally upon the
Wolf's-hill. (*HENRY retires.*) And do you stand
back (*to the soldiers*). (*He brings WICKERD forward.*)

GEORGE (*with marked apprehension*).

What did Martin say to thee, Wickerd?—tell
me, on thy allegiance.

WICKERD.

Mere ravings, sir knight— offered me his sword
to kill you.

GEORGE.

Said he aught of killing any one else?

WICKERD.

No : the pain of his wound seemed to have
brought on a fever.

GEORGE (*clasps his hands together*).

I breathe again—I spy comfort. Why could I
not see as well as this fellow, that the wounded
wretch may have been distracted? Let me at
least think so till proof shall show the truth (*aside*).
Wickerd, think not on what I said—the heat of
the battle had chafed my blood. Thou hast wished
for the Nether farm at Ebersdorf—it shall be
thine.

WICKERD.

Thanks, my noble lord.

Re-enter HENRY.

HENRY.

No—they do not rally—they have had enough of it—but Wickerd and Conrad shall remain, with twenty troopers and a score of cross-bowmen, and scour the woods towards Griefenhaus, to prevent the fugitives from making head. We will, with the rest, to Ebersdorf. What say you, brother?

GEORGE.

Well ordered. Wickerd, look thou search everywhere for Martin: bring him to me dead or alive; leave not a nook of the wood unsought.

WICKERD.

I warrant you, noble sir, I shall find him, could he clew himself up like a dormouse.

HENRY.

I think he must be prisoner.

GEORGE.

Heaven forefend! Take a trumpet, Eustace (*to an attendant*); ride to the castle of Maltingen, and demand a parley. If Martin is prisoner, offer any ransom: offer ten—twenty—all our prisoners in exchange.

EUSTACE.

It shall be done, sir knight.

HENRY.

Ere we go, sound trumpets—strike up the song of victory.

SONG.

Joy to the victors! the sons of old Aspen!
Joy to the race of the battle and scar!
Glory's proud garland triumphantly grasping,
Generous in peace, and victorious in war.
Honour acquiring,
Valour inspiring,
Bursting, resistless, through foemen they go:
War-axes wielding,
Broken ranks yielding,
Till from the battle proud Roderic retiring,
Yields in wild rout the fair palm to his foe.

Joy to each warrior, true follower of Aspen!
Joy to the heroes that gain'd the bold day!
Health to our wounded, in agony gasping;
Peace to our brethren that fell in the fray!
Boldly this morning,
Roderic's power scorning,
Well for their chieftain their blades did they wield:
Joy blest them dying,
As Maltingen flying,
Low laid his banners, our conquest adorning,
Their death-clouded eyeballs descried on the field!

Now to our home, the proud mansion of Aspen,
Bend we, gay victors, triumphant away:
There each fond damsel, her gallant youth clasping,
Shall wipe from his forehead the stains of the fray.
Listening the prancing
Of horses advancing,
E'en now on the turrets our maidens appear;
Love our hearts warming,
Songs the night charming,
Round goes the grape in the goblet gay dancing;
Love, wine, and song, our blithe evening shall cheer!

HENRY.

Now spread our banners, and to Ebersdorf in triumph. We carry relief to the anxious, joy to the heart of the aged, brother George. (*Going off.*)

GEORGE.

Or treble misery and death.

[*Apart, and following slowly.*

The music sounds, and the followers of Aspen begin to file across the stage. The curtain falls.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

Castle of Ebersdorf.

RUDIGER, ISABELLA, and GERTRUDE.

RUDIGER.

I prithee, dear wife, be merry. It must be over by this time, and happily, otherwise the bad news had reached us.

ISABELLA.

Should we not, then, have heard the tidings of the good?

RUDIGER.

Oh! these fly slower by half. Besides, I warrant all of them engaged in the pursuit. Oh! not a page would leave the skirts of the fugitives till they were fairly beaten into their holds; but had the boys lost the day, the stragglers had made for the castle. Go to the window, Gertrude : see'st thou any thing?

GERTRUDE.

I think I see a horseman.

ISABELLA.

A single rider : then I fear me much.

GERTRUDE.

It is only Father Ludovic.

RUDIGER.

A plague on thee! didst thou take a fat friar on a mule for a trooper of the house of Aspen?

GERTRUDE.

But yonder is a great cloud of dust.

RUDIGER (*eagerly*).

Indeed!

GERTRUDE.

It is only the wine-sledges going to my aunt's convent.

RUDIGER.

The devil confound the wine-sledges, and the mules, and the monks! Come from the window, and torment me no longer, thou seer of strange sights.

GERTRUDE.

Dear uncle, what can I do to amuse you? Shall I tell you what I dreamed this morning?

RUDIGER.

Nonsense : but say on; any thing is better than silence.

GERTRUDE.

I thought I was in the chapel, and they were burying my Aunt Isabella alive. And who, do you think, aunt, were the grave-diggers who shovelled in the earth upon you? Even Baron George and old Martin.

ISABELLA (*appears shocked*).

Heaven! what an idea!

GERTRUDE.

Do but think of my terror—and Minhold the minstrel played all the while to drown your screams.

RUDIGER.

And old Father Ludovic danced a saraband, with the steeple of the new convent upon his thick skull by way of mitre. A truce to this nonsense. Give us a song, my love, and leave thy dreams and visions.

GERTRUDE.

What shall I sing to you?

RUDIGER.

Sing to me of war.

GERTRUDE.

I cannot sing of battle; but I will sing you the Lament of Eleanor of Toro, when her lover was slain in the wars.

ISABELLA.

Oh, no laments, Gertrude.

RUDIGER.

Then sing a song of mirth.

ISABELLA.

Dear husband, is this a time for mirth?

RUDIGER.

Is it neither a time to sing of mirth nor of sorrow? Isabella would rather hear Father Ludovic chant the "De profundis."

GERTRUDE.

Dear uncle, be not angry. At present, I can only sing the lay of poor Eleanor. It comes to

my heart at this moment as if the sorrowful mourner had been my own sister.

SONG.

Sweet shone the sun on the fair lake of Toro,
Weak were the whispers that waved the dark wood,
As a fair maiden, bewilder'd in sorrow,
Sigh'd to the breezes and wept to the flood :—

« Saints, from the mansion of bliss lowly bending,
Virgin, that hear'st the poor suppliant's cry,
Grant my petition, in anguish ascending,
My Frederick restore, or let Eleanor die.»

Distant and faint were the sounds of the battle;
With the breezes they rise, with the breezes they fail,
Till the shout, and the groan, and the conflict's dread rattle,
And the chase's wild clamour came loading the gale.

Breathless she gazed through the woodland so dreary,
Slowly approaching, a warrior was seen;
Life's ebbing tide mark'd his footsteps so weary,
Cleft was his helmet, and woe was his mien.

« Save thee, fair maid, for our armies are flying;
Save thee, fair maid, for thy guardian is low;
Cold on yon heath thy bold Frederick is lying,
Fast through the woodland approaches the foe.»—

[*The voice of GERTRUDE sinks by degrees, till she bursts into tears.*

RUDIGER.

How now, Gertrude?

GERTRUDE.

Alas! may not the fate of poor Eleanor at this moment be mine?

RUDIGER.

Never, my girl, never—(*Military music is heard.*)
—Hark! Hark! to the sounds that tell thee so.

[*All rise and run to the window.*]

RUDIGER.

Joy! joy! they come, and come victorious.
(*The chorus of the war-song is heard without.*) Wel-
come! welcome! once more have my old eyes seen
the banners of the house of Maltingen trampled
in the dust.—Isabella, broach our oldest casks:
wine is sweet after war.

Enter HENRY, followed by REYNOLD and troopers.

RUDIGER.

Joy to thee, my boy: let me press thee to this
old heart.

ISABELLA.

Bless thee, my son—(*embraces him*)—Oh, how
many hours of bitterness are compensated by this
embrace. Bless thee, my Henry! where hast
thou left thy brother?

HENRY.

Hard at hand: by this he is crossing the draw-
bridge. Hast thou no greetings for me, Gertrude?
(*Goes to her.*)

GERTRUDE.

I joy not in battles.

RUDIGER.

But she had tears for thy danger.

HENRY.

Thanks, my gentle Gertrude. See, I have brought back thy scarf from no inglorious field.

GERTRUDE.

It is bloody!—(*shocked.*)

RUDIGER.

Dost start at that, my girl? Were it his own blood as it is that of his foes, thou shouldst glory in it.—Go, Reynold, make good cheer with thy fellows.

[*Exit REYNOLD and soldiers.*]

Enter GEORGE pensively.

GEORGE (*goes straight to RUDIGER*).

Father, thy blessing.

RUDIGER.

Thou hast it, boy.

ISABELLA (*rushes to embrace him—he avoids her*).

How? Art thou wounded?

GEORGE.

No.

RUDIGER.

Thou lookest deadly pale.

GEORGE.

It is nothing.

ISABELLA.

Heaven's blessing on my gallant George.

GEORGE (*aside*).

Dares she bestow a blessing?—Oh, Martin's tale was frenzy!

ISABELLA.

Smile upon us for once, my son; darken not thy brow on this day of gladness—few are our moments of joy—should not my sons share in them?

GEORGE (*aside*).

She has moments of joy—it *was* frenzy then.

ISABELLA.

Gertrude, my love, assist me to disarm the knight.—(*She loosens and takes off his casque.*)

GERTRUDE.

There is one, two, three hacks, and none has pierced the steel.

RUDIGER.

Let me see. Let me see. A trusty casque!

GERTRUDE.

Else hadst thou gone.

ISABELLA.

I will reward the armourer with its weight in gold.

GEORGE (*aside*).

She *must* be innocent.

GERTRUDE.

And Henry's shield is hacked, too. — Let me show it to your uncle.—(*She carries HENRY's to RUDIGER.*)

RUDIGER.

Do, my love—and come hither, Henry; thou shalt tell me how the day went.

[HENRY and GERTRUDE converse apart with RUDIGER. GEORGE comes forward. ISABELLA comes to him.]

ISABELLA.

Surely, George, some evil has befallen thee. Grave thou art ever, but so dreadfully gloomy—

GEORGE.

Evil, indeed.—(Aside.) Now for the trial.

ISABELLA.

Has your loss been great?

GEORGE.

No!—Yes!—*(Apart.)* I cannot do it.

ISABELLA.

Perhaps some friend lost?

GEORGE.

It must be.—*Martin is dead.—(He regards her with apprehension, but steadily, as he pronounces these words.)*

ISABELLA *(starts, then shows a ghastly expression of joy).*

Dead!

GEORGE *(almost overcome by his feelings).*

Guilty! Guilty!—*(apart.)*

ISABELLA *(without observing his emotion).*

Didst thou say dead?

GEORGE.

Did I—no—I only said mortally wounded.

ISABELLA.

Wounded? only wounded? Where is he? Let me fly to him.—*(Going.)*

GEORGE *(sternly).*

Hold, lady!—Speak not so loud!—Thou canst not see him!—He is a prisoner.

ISABELLA.

A prisoner, and wounded? Fly to his deli-

verance!—Offer wealth, lands, castles,—all our possessions, for his ransom. Never shall I know peace till these walls, or till the grave secures him.

GEORGE (*apart*).

Guilty! guilty!

Enter PETER.

PETER.

Hugo, squire to the Count of Maltingen, has arrived with a message.

RUDIGER.

I will receive him in the hall.

[*Exit, leaning on* GERTRUDE *and* HENRY.

ISABELLA.

Go, George—see after Martin.

GEORGE (*firmly*).

No—I have a task to perform; and though the earth should open and devour me alive—I will accomplish it. But first—but first—Nature, take thy tribute.—(*He falls on his mother's neck, and weeps bitterly.*)

ISABELLA.

George! my son! for Heaven's sake, what dreadful frenzy!

GEORGE (*walks two turns across the stage, and composes himself*).

Listen, mother—I knew a knight in Hungary, gallant in battle, hospitable and generous in peace. The king gave him his friendship, and the administration of a province; that province

was infested by thieves and murderers. You mark me?—

ISABELLA.

Most heedfully.

GEORGE.

The knight was sworn—bound by an oath the most dreadful that can be taken by man—to deal among offenders, even-handed, stern and impartial justice. Was it not a dreadful vow?

ISABELLA (*with an affectation of composure*).

Solemn, doubtless, as the oath of every magistrate.

GEORGE.

And inviolable?

ISABELLA.

Surely—inviolable.

GEORGE.

Well! it happened, that when he rode out against the banditti, he made a prisoner. And who, think you, that prisoner was?

ISABELLA.

I know not (*with increasing terror*).

GEORGE (*trembling, but proceeding rapidly*).

His own twin brother, who sucked the same breasts with him, and lay in the bosom of the same mother; his brother whom he loved as his own soul—what should that knight have done unto his brother?

ISABELLA (*almost speechless*).

Alas! what did he do?

GEORGE.

He did (*turning his head from her, and with*

clasped hands) what I can never do :—he did his duty.

ISABELLA.

My son! My son!—Mercy! Mercy! (*Clings to him.*)

GEORGE.

Is it then true?

ISABELLA.

What?

GEORGE.

What Martin said! (*ISABELLA hides her face.*) It is true!

ISABELLA (*locks up with an air of dignity*).

Hear, Framers of the laws of nature! the mother is judged by the child—(*Turns towards him.*) Yes, it is true—true that, fearful of my own life, I secured it by the murder of my tyrant. Mistaken coward! I little knew on what terrors I ran, to avoid one moment's agony.—Thou hast the secret!

GEORGE.

Knowest thou to whom thou hast told it?

ISABELLA.

To my son.

GEORGE.

No! no! to an executioner.

ISABELLA.

Be it so—go, proclaim my crime, and forget not my punishment. Forget not that the murderess of her husband has dragged out years of hidden remorse, to be brought at last to the scaffold by her own cherished son!—Thou art silent.

GEORGE.

The language of Nature is no more! How shall I learn another?

ISABELLA.

Look upon me, George. Should the executioner be abashed before the criminal—look upon me, my son. From my soul do I forgive thee.

GEORGE.

Forgive me what?

ISABELLA.

What thou dost meditate—be vengeance heavy, but let it be secret—add not the death of a father to that of the sinner! Oh, Rudiger! Rudiger! innocent cause of all my guilt and all my wo, how wilt thou tear thy silver locks when thou shalt hear her guilt whom thou hast so often clasped to thy bosom—hear her infamy proclaimed by the son of thy fondest hopes—(*weeps*).

GEORGE (*struggling for breath*).

Nature will have utterance: mother, dearest mother, I will save you or perish! (*Throws himself into her arms.*) Thus fall my vows.

ISABELLA.

Man thyself! I ask not safety from thee. Never shall it be said, that Isabella of Aspen turned her son from the path of duty, though his footsteps must pass over her mangled corpse. Man thyself.

GEORGE.

No! no! The ties of Nature were knit by God himself. Cursed be the stoic pride that would rend them asunder, and call it virtue!

ISABELLA.

My son! My son!—How shall I behold thee hereafter?

[*Three knocks are heard upon the door of the apartment.*]

GEORGE.

Hark! One—two—three. Roderic, thou art speedy! (*Apart.*)

ISABELLA (*opens the door*).

A parchment stuck to the door with a poniard! (*Opens it.*) Heaven and earth!—a summons from the invisible judges!—(*Drops the parchment.*)

GEORGE (*reads with emotion*).

“Isabella of Aspen, accused of murder by poison, we conjure thee, by the cord and by the steel, to appear this night before the avengers of blood, who judge in secret and avenge in secret, like the Deity. As thou art innocent or guilty, so be thy deliverance.”—Martin, Martin, thou hast played false!

ISABELLA.

Alas! whither shall I fly?

GEORGE.

Thou canst not fly; instant death would follow the attempt; a hundred thousand arms would be raised against thy life; every morsel thou didst taste, every drop which thou didst drink, the very breeze of heaven that fanned thee, would come loaded with destruction. One chance of safety is open:—obey the summons.

ISABELLA.

And perish.—Yet why should I still fear death? Be it so.

GEORGE.

No—I have sworn to save you. I will not do the work by halves. Does any one save Martin know of the dreadful deed?

ISABELLA.

None.

GEORGE.

Then go—assert your innocence, and leave the rest to me.

ISABELLA.

Wretch that I am! How can I support the task you would impose?

GEORGE.

Think on my father. Live for him: he will need all the comfort thou canst bestow. Let the thought that his destruction is involved in thine, carry thee through the dreadful trial.

ISABELLA.

Be it so.—For Rudiger I have lived: for him I will continue to bear the burden of existence: but the instant that my guilt comes to his knowledge shall be the last of my life. Ere I would bear from him one glance of hatred or of scorn, this dagger should drink my blood. (*Puts the poniard into her bosom.*)

GEORGE.

Fear not. He can never know. No evidence shall appear against you.

ISABELLA.

How shall I obey the summons, and where find the terrible judgment-seat?

GEORGE.

Leave that to the judges. Resolve but to obey, and a conductor will be found. Go to the chapel; there pray for your sins and for mine. (*He leads her out, and returns.*)—Sins, indeed! I break a dreadful vow, but I save the life of a parent; and the penance I will do for my perjury shall appal even the judges of blood.

Enter REYNOLD.

REYNOLD.

Sir knight, the messenger of Count Roderic desires to speak with you.

GEORGE.

Admit him.

Enter HUGO.

HUGO.

Count Roderic of Maltingen greets you. He says he will this night hear the bat flutter and the owlet scream; and he bids me ask if thou also wilt listen to the music.

GEORGE.

I understand him. I will be there.

HUGO.

And the count says to you, that he will not ransom your wounded squire, though you would down-weigh his best horse with gold. But you may send him a confessor, for the count says he will need one.

GEORGE.

Is he so near death?

HUGO.

Not as it seems to me. He is weak through loss of blood; but since his wound was dressed he can both stand and walk. Our count has a notable balsam, which has recruited him much.

GEORGE.

Enough—I will send a priest.—(*Exit HUGO.*) I fathom his plot. He would add another witness to the tale of Martin's guilt. But no priest shall approach him. Reynold, thinkest thou not we could send one of the troopers, disguised as a monk, to aid Martin in making his escape?

REYNOLD.

Noble sir, the followers of your house are so well known to those of Maltingen, that I fear it is impossible.

GEORGE.

Knowest thou of no stranger who might be employed? His reward shall exceed even his hopes.

REYNOLD.

So please you—I think the minstrel could well execute such a commission: he is shrewd and cunning, and can write and read like a priest.

GEORGE.

Call him.—(*Exit REYNOLD.*) If this fails, I must employ open force. Were Martin removed, no tongue can assert the bloody truth.

Enter MINSTREL.

GEORGE.

Come hither, Minhold. Hast thou courage to undertake a dangerous enterprise?

BERTRAM.

My life, sir knight, has been one scene of danger and of dread. I have forgotten how to fear.

GEORGE.

Thy speech is above thy seeming.—Who art thou?

BERTRAM.

An unfortunate knight, obliged to shroud myself under this disguise.

GEORGE.

What is the cause of thy misfortunes?

BERTRAM.

I slew, at a tournament, a prince, and was laid under the ban of the empire.

GEORGE.

I have interest with the emperor. Swear to perform what task I shall impose on thee, and I will procure the recal of the ban.

BERTRAM.

I swear.

GEORGE.

Then take the disguise of a monk, and go with the follower of Count Roderic, as if to confess my wounded squire Martin. Give him thy dress, and remain in prison in his stead. Thy captivity shall be short, and I pledge my knightly word I

will labour to execute my promise, when thou shalt have leisure to unfold thy history.

BERTRAM.

I will do as you direct. Is the life of your squire in danger?

GEORGE.

It is, unless thou canst accomplish his release.

BERTRAM.

I will essay it. [Exit.]

GEORGE.

Such are the mean expedients to which George of Aspen must now resort. No longer can I debate with Roderic in the field. The depraved—the perjured knight must contend with him only in the arts of dissimulation and treachery. Oh mother, mother! the most bitter consequence of thy crime has been the birth of thy first-born! But I must warn my brother of the impending storm. Poor Henry, how little can thy gay temper anticipate evil! What, ho there!

Enter an ATTENDANT.

Where is Baron Henry?

ATTENDANT.

Noble sir, he rode forth, after a slight refreshment, to visit the party in the field.

GEORGE.

Saddle my steed! I will follow him.

ATTENDANT.

So please you, your noble father has twice demanded your presence at the banquet.

GEORGE.

It matters not—say that I have ridden forth to
the Wolf's-hill. Where is thy lady?

ATTENDANT.

In the chapel, sir knight.

GEORGE.

'Tis well—saddle my bay horse—(*apart*) for the
last time. [*Exit.*

It is a pity that I have written to you
the 11th of July. Why is it that
I have not yet received your letter?
In the chapel, in August.
George
I am well and hope you are the
last time.
I am, Sir,
Yours, Sir,
George

I am well and hope you are the
last time. I am, Sir,
Yours, Sir,
George

I am well and hope you are the
last time. I am, Sir,
Yours, Sir,
George

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

*The wood of Griefenhaus, with the ruins of the Castle.
A nearer view of the Castle than in Act Second, but
still at some distance.*

*Enter RODERIC, WOLFSTEIN, and Soldiers, as from a
reconnoitring party.*

WOLFSTEIN.

They mean to improve their success, and will
push their advantage far. We must retreat be-
times, Count Roderic.

RODERIC.

We are safe here for the present. They make
no immediate motion of advance. I fancy neither
George nor Henry are with their party in the
wood.

Enter HUGO.

HUGO.

Noble sir, how shall I tell what has happened?

RODERIC.

What?

HUGO.

Martin has escaped.

RODERIC.

Villain! thy life shall pay it! (*Strikes at HUGO—
is held by WOLFSTEIN.*)

WOLFSTEIN.

Hold, hold, Count Roderic! Hugo may be blameless.

RODERIC.

Reckless slave! how came he to escape?

HUGO.

Under the disguise of a monk's habit, whom by your orders we brought to confess him.

RODERIC.

Has he been long gone?

HUGO.

An hour and more since he passed our sentinels, disguised as the chaplain of Aspen: but he walked so slowly and feebly, I think he cannot yet have reached the posts of the enemy.

RODERIC.

Where is the treacherous priest?

HUGO.

He waits his doom not far from hence.

[*Exit HUGO.*]

RODERIC.

Drag him hither. The miscreant that snatched the morsel of vengeance from the lion of Maltingen, shall expire under torture.

Re-enter HUGO, with BERTRAM and Attendants.

RODERIC.

Villain! what tempted thee, under the garb of a minister of religion, to steal a criminal from the hand of justice?

BERTRAM.

I am no villain, Count Roderic; and I only aided the escape of one wounded wretch whom thou didst mean to kill basely.

RODERIC.

Liar and slave! thou hast assisted a murderer, upon whom justice had sacred claims.

BERTRAM.

I warn thee again, count, that I am neither liar nor slave. Shortly I hope to tell thee I am once more thy equal.

RODERIC.

Thou! Thou!—

BERTRAM.

Yes! the name of Bertram of Ebersdorf was once not unknown to thee.

RODERIC (*astonished*).

Thou Bertram! the brother of Arnolf of Ebersdorf, first husband of the Baroness Isabella of Aspen?

BERTRAM.

The same.

RODERIC.

Who, in a quarrel at a tournament, many years

since, slew a blood-relation of the emperor, and was laid under the ban?

BERTRAM.

The same.

RODERIC.

And who has now, in the disguise of a priest, aided the escape of Martin, squire to George of Aspen?

BERTRAM.

The same—the same.

RODERIC.

Then, by the holy cross of Cologne, thou hast set at liberty the murderer of thy brother Arnolf!

BERTRAM.

How! What! I understand thee not!

RODERIC.

Miserable plotter!—Martin, by his own confession, as Wolfstein heard, avowed having aided Isabella in the murder of her husband. I had laid such a plan of vengeance as should have made all Germany shudder. And thou hast counteracted it—thou, the brother of the murdered Arnolf!

BERTRAM.

Can this be so, Wolfstein?

WOLFSTEIN.

I heard Martin confess the murder.

BERTRAM.

Then am I indeed unfortunate!

RODERIC.

What, in the name of evil, brought thee here?

BERTRAM.

I am the last of my race. When I was outlawed, as thou knowest, the lands of Ebersdorf, my rightful inheritance, were declared forfeited, and the emperor bestowed them upon Rudiger when he married Isabella. I attempted to defend my domain, but Rudiger—Hell thank him for it—enforced the ban against me at the head of his vassals, and I was constrained to fly. Since then I have warred against the Saracens in Spain and Palestine.

RODERIC.

But why didst thou return to a land where death attends thy being discovered?

BERTRAM.

Impatience urged me to see once more the land of my nativity, and the towers of Ebersdorf. I came there yesterday, under the name of the minstrel Minhold.

RODERIC.

And what prevailed on thee to undertake to deliver Martin?

BERTRAM.

George, though I told not my name, engaged to procure the recal of the ban; besides, he told me Martin's life was in danger, and I accounted the old villain to be the last remaining follower of our house. But, as God shall judge me, the tale of horror thou hast mentioned I could not have even suspected. Report ran, that my brother died of the plague.

WOLFSTEIN.

Raised for the purpose, doubtless, of preventing attendance upon his sick-bed, and an inspection of his body.

BERTRAM.

My vengeance shall be dreadful as its cause! The usurpers of my inheritance, the robbers of my honour, the murderers of my brother, shall be cut off, root and branch!

RODERIC.

Thou art, then, welcome here; especially if thou art still a true brother to our invisible order.

BERTRAM.

I am.

RODERIC.

There is a meeting this night on the business of thy brother's death. Some are now come. I must despatch them in pursuit of Martin.

Enter HUGO.

HUGO.

The foes advance, sir knight.

RODERIC.

Back! back to the ruins! Come with us, Bertram; on the road thou shalt hear the dreadful history. [Exeunt.]

*From the opposite side enter GEORGE, HENRY,
WICKERD, CONRAD, and Soldiers.*

GEORGE.

No news of Martin yet?

WICKERD.

None, sir knight.

GEORGE.

Nor of the minstrel?

WICKERD.

None.

GEORGE.

Then he has betrayed me, or is prisoner—
misery either way. Begone, and search the wood,
Wickerd.

[Exeunt WICKERD and followers.

HENRY.

Still this dreadful gloom on thy brow, brother?

GEORGE.

Ay! what else?

HENRY.

Once thou thoughtst me worthy of thy friend-
ship.

GEORGE.

Henry, thou art young—

HENRY.

Shall I therefore betray thy confidence?

GEORGE.

No! but thou art gentle, and well-natured.
Thy mind cannot even support the burden which

mine must bear, far less wilt thou approve the means I shall use to throw it off.

HENRY.

Try me.

GEORGE.

I may not.

HENRY.

Then thou dost no longer love me.

GEORGE.

I love thee, and because I love thee, I will not involve thee in my distress.

HENRY.

I will bear it with thee.

GEORGE.

Shouldst thou share it, it would be doubled to me!

HENRY.

Fear not, I will find a remedy.

GEORGE.

It would cost thee peace of mind, here and hereafter.

HENRY.

I take the risk.

GEORGE.

It may not be, Henry. Thou wouldst become the confidant of crimes past—the accomplice of others to come.

HENRY.

Shall I guess?

GEORGE.

I charge thee, no!

HENRY.

I must. Thou art one of the secret judges.

GEORGE.

Unhappy boy! what hast thou said?

HENRY.

Is it not so?

GEORGE.

Dost thou know what the discovery has cost thee?

HENRY.

I care not.

GEORGE.

He who discovers any part of our mystery must himself become one of our number.

HENRY.

How so?

GEORGE.

If he does not consent, his secrecy will be speedily ensured by his death. To that we are sworn—take thy choice!

HENRY.

Well, are you not banded in secret to punish those offenders whom the sword of justice cannot reach, or who are shielded from its stroke by the buckler of power?

GEORGE.

Such is indeed the purpose of our fraternity; but the end is pursued through paths dark, intricate, and slippery with blood. Who is he that shall tread them with safety? Accursed be the hour in which I entered the labyrinth, and doubly

accursed that, in which thou too must lose the cheerful sunshine of a soul without a mystery!

HENRY.

Yet for thy sake will I be a member.

GEORGE.

Henry, thou didst rise this morning a free man. No one could say to thee, "Why dost thou so?" Thou layest thee down to-night the veriest slave that ever tugged at an oar. The slave of men whose actions will appear to thee savage and incomprehensible, and whom thou must aid against the world upon peril of thy throat.

HENRY.

Be it so. I will share your lot.

GEORGE.

Alas, Henry! Heaven forbid! But since thou hast by a hasty word fettered thyself, I will avail myself of thy bondage. Mount thy fleetest steed, and hie thee this very night to the Duke of Bavaria. He is chief and paramount of our chapter. Show him this signet and this letter; tell him that matters will be this night discussed concerning the house of Aspen. Bid him speed him to the assembly, for he well knows the president is our deadly foe. He will admit thee a member of our holy body.

HENRY.

Who is the foe whom you dread?

GEORGE.

Young man, the first duty thou must learn is, implicit and blind obedience.

HENRY.

Well! I shall soon return and see thee again.

GEORGE.

Return, indeed, thou wilt; but for the rest—well! that matters not.

HENRY.

I go: thou wilt set a watch here.

GEORGE.

I will. (HENRY *going*.) Return, my dear Henry; let me embrace thee, shouldst thou not see me again.

HENRY.

Heaven! what mean you?

GEORGE.

Nothing. The life of mortals is precarious, and should we not meet again, take my blessing and this embrace—and this—(*embraces him warmly*). And now haste to the duke. [*Exit HENRY.*] Poor youth, thou little knowest what thou hast undertaken. But if Martin has escaped, and if the duke arrives, they will not dare to proceed without proof.

Re-enter WICKERD and followers.

WICKERD.

We have made a follower of Maltingen prisoner, Baron George, who reports that Martin has escaped.

GEORGE.

Jov! joy! such joy as I can now feel! Set him

free for the good news—and, Wickerd, keep a good watch in this spot all night. Send out scouts to find Martin, lest he should not be able to reach Ebersdorf.

WICKERD.

I shall, noble sir.

[*The kettle-drums and trumpets flourish as for setting the watch : the Scene closes.*

SCENE II.

The Chapel at Ebersdorf, an ancient Gothic Building.

ISABELLA is discovered rising from before the Altar, on which burn two tapers.

ISABELLA.

I cannot pray. Terror and guilt have stifled devotion. The heart must be at ease—the hands must be pure, when they are lifted to Heaven. Midnight is the hour of summons: it is now near. How can I pray when I go resolved to deny a crime which every drop of my blood could not wash away! And my son! Oh! he will fall the victim of my crime! Arnolf! Arnolf! thou art dreadfully avenged! (*Tap at the door.*) The footstep of my dreadful guide. (*Tap again.*) My courage is no more.

Enter GERTRUDE by the door.

Gertrude, is it only thou? (*embraces her.*)

GERTRUDE.

Dear aunt, leave this awful place; it chills my very blood. My uncle sent me to call you to the hall.

ISABELLA.

Who is in the hall?

GERTRUDE.

Only Reynold and the family, with whom my uncle is making merry.

ISABELLA.

Sawest thou no strange faces?

GERTRUDE.

No; none but friends.

ISABELLA.

Art thou sure of that? Is George there?

GERTRUDE.

No, nor Henry; both have ridden out. I think they might have staid one day at least. But come, aunt, I hate this place; it reminds me of my dream. See, yonder was the spot where methought they were burying you alive, below yon monument (*pointing*).

ISABELLA (*starting*).

The monument of my first husband. Leave me, leave me, Gertrude. I follow in a moment. [*Exit GERTRUDE.*] Ay, there he lies! forgetful alike of his crimes and injuries! Insensible, as if this chapel had never rung with my shrieks, or

the castle resounded to his parting groans! When shall I sleep so soundly? (*As she gazes on the monument, a figure muffled in black appears from behind it.*) Merciful God! is it a vision, such as has haunted my couch? (*It approaches: she goes on with mingled terror and resolution.*) Ghastly phantom, art thou the restless spirit of one who died in agony, or art thou the mysterious being that must guide me to the presence of the avengers of blood? (*Figure bends its head and beckons.*)—To-morrow! To-morrow! I cannot follow thee now! (*Figure shows a dagger from beneath its cloak.*) Compulsion! I understand thee: I will follow. (*She follows the figure a little way; he turns, and wraps a black veil round her head, and takes her hand: then both exeunt behind the monument.*)

SCENE III.

The Wood of Griefenhaus.

A watch-fire, round which sit WICKERD, CONRAD, and others, in their watch-cloaks.

WICKERD.

The night is bitter cold.

CONRAD.

Ay, but thou hast lined thy doublet well with old Rhenish.

WICKERD.

True; and I'll give ye warrant for it.
(*Sings.*)—

(RHEIN-WEIN LEID.)

What makes the troopers' frozen courage muster?

The grapes of juice divine.

Upon the Rhine, upon the Rhine they cluster:

Oh, blessed be the Rhine!

Let fringe and furs, and many a rabbit skin, sirs,

Bedeck your Saracen;

He'll freeze without what warms our hearts within, sirs,

When the night-frost crusts the fen.

But on the Rhine, but on the Rhine they cluster,

The grapes of juice divine,

That make our troopers' frozen courage muster:

Oh, blessed be the Rhine!

CONRAD.

Well sung, Wickerd; thou wert ever a jovial
soul.

Enter a Trooper or two more.

WICKERD.

Hast thou made the rounds, Frank?

FRANK.

Yes, up to the hemlock marsh. It is a stormy
night; the moon shone on the Wolf's-hill, and on
the dead bodies with which to-day's work has

covered it. We heard the spirit of the house of Maltingen wailing over the slaughter of its adherents : I durst go no farther.

WICKERD.

Hen-hearted rascal ! The spirit of some old raven, who was picking their bones.

CONRAD.

Nay, Wickerd ; the churchmen say there are such things.

FRANK.

Ay ; and Father Ludovic told us last sermon, how the devil twisted the neck of ten farmers at Kletterbach, who refused to pay Peter's pence.

WICKERD.

Yes, some church devil, no doubt.

FRANK.

Nay, old Reynold says, that in passing, by midnight, near the old chapel at our castle, he saw it all lighted up, and heard a chorus of voices sing the funeral service.

ANOTHER SOLDIER.

Father Ludovic heard the same.

WICKERD.

Hear me, ye hare-livered boys ! Can you look death in the face in battle, and dread such nursery bugbears ? Old Reynold saw his vision in the strength of the grape. As for the chaplain, far be it from me to name the spirit which visits him ; but I know what I know, when I found him confessing Bertrand's pretty Agnes in the chestnut grove.

CONRAD.

But, Wickerd, though I have often heard of strange tales which I could not credit, yet there is one in our family so well attested, that I almost believe it. Shall I tell it you?

ALL SOLDIERS.

Do! do tell it, gentle Conrad.

WICKERD.

And I will take t' other sup of Rhenish to fence against the horrors of the tale.

CONRAD.

It is about my own uncle and godfather, Albert of Horsheim.

WICKERD.

I have seen him—he was a gallant warrior.

CONRAD.

Well! He was long absent in the Bohemian wars. In an expedition he was benighted, and came to a lone house on the edge of a forest: he and his followers knocked repeatedly for entrance in vain. They forced the door, but found no inhabitants.

FRANK.

And they made good their quarters?

CONRAD.

They did: and Albert retired to rest in an upper chamber. Opposite to the bed on which he threw himself was a large mirror. At midnight he was awaked by deep groans: he cast his eyes upon the mirror, and saw——

FRANK.

Sacred Heaven! Heard you nothing?

WICKERD.

Ay, the wind among the withered leaves. Go on, Conrad. Your uncle was a wise man.

CONRAD.

That's more than grey hairs can make other folks.

WICKERD.

Ha! stripling, art thou so malapert? Though thou art Lord Henry's page, I shall teach thee who commands this party.

ALL SOLDIERS.

Peace, peace, good Wickerd: let Conrad proceed.

CONRAD.

Where was I?

FRANK.

About the mirror.

CONRAD.

True. My uncle beheld in the mirror the reflection of a human face, distorted and covered with blood. A voice pronounced articulately, "It is yet time." As the words were spoken, my uncle discerned in the ghastly visage the features of his own father.

SOLDIER.

Hush! By St Francis I heard a groan. (*They start up all but WICKERD.*)

WICKERD.

The croaking of a frog, who has caught cold in this bitter night, and sings rather more hoarsely than usual.

FRANK.

Wickerd, thou art surely no Christian. (*They sit down, and close round the fire.*)

CONRAD.

Well—my uncle called up his attendants, and they searched every nook of the chamber, but found nothing. So they covered the mirror with a cloth, and Albert was left alone: but hardly had he closed his eyes when the same voice proclaimed, “It is now too late;” the covering was drawn aside, and he saw the figure—

FRANK.

Merciful Virgin! It comes. (*All rise.*)

WICKERD.

Where? what?

CONRAD.

See yon figure coming from the thicket!

Enter MARTIN, in the monk's dress, much disordered: his face is very pale, and his steps slow.

WICKERD (*levelling his pike*).

Man or devil, which thou wilt, thou shalt feel cold iron if thou budgest a foot nearer! (*MARTIN stops.*) Who art thou? what dost thou seek?

MARTIN.

To warm myself at your fire. It is deadly cold.

WICKERD.

See there, ye cravens, your apparition is a poor benighted monk: sit down, father. (*They place MARTIN by the fire.*) By heaven, it is Martin—our

Martin ! Martin, how fares it with thee ? We have sought thee this whole night.

MARTIN.

So have many others (*vacantly*).

CONRAD.

Yes, thy master.

MARTIN.

Did you see him too ?

CONRAD.

Whom ? Baron George ?

MARTIN.

No ! my first master, Arnold of Ebersdorf.

WICKERD.

He raves.

MARTIN.

He passed me but now in the wood, mounted upon his old black steed ; its nostrils breathed smoke and flame ; neither tree nor rock stopped him. He said, « Martin, thou wilt return this night to my service ! »

WICKERD.

Wrap thy cloak around him, Francis ; he is distracted with cold and pain. Dost thou not recollect me, old friend ?

MARTIN.

Yes, you are the butler at Ebersdorf : you have the charge of the large gilded cup, embossed with the figures of the twelve apostles. It was the favourite goblet of my old master.

CONRAD.

By our Lady, Martin, thou must be distracted

indeed, to think our master would intrust Wick-
erd with the care of the cellar.

MARTIN.

I know a face so like the apostate Judas on that
cup. I have seen the likeness when I gazed on a
mirror.

WICKERD.

Try to go to sleep, dear Martin; it will relieve
thy brain. (*Footsteps are heard in the wood.*) To
your arms. (*They take their arms.*)

*Enter two Members of the Invisible Tribunal, muf-
fled in their cloaks.*

CONRAD.

Stand! Who are ye?

FIRST MEMBER.

Travellers benighted in the wood.

WICKERD.

Are ye friends to Aspen or Maltingen?

FIRST MEMBER.

We enter not into their quarrel: we are friends
to the right.

WICKERD.

Then are ye friends to us, and welcome to pass
the night by our fire.

SECOND MEMBER.

Thanks. (*They approach the fire, and regard
MARTIN very earnestly.*)

CONRAD.

Hear ye any news abroad?

SECOND MEMBER.

None ; but that oppression and villany are rife and rank as ever.

WICKERD.

The old complaint.

FIRST MEMBER.

No ! never did former age equal this in wickedness ; and yet, as if the daily commission of enormities were not enough to blot the sun, every hour discovers crimes which have lain concealed for years.

CONRAD.

Pity the Holy Tribunal should slumber in its office.

SECOND MEMBER.

Young man, it slumbers not. When criminals are ripe for its vengeance, it falls like the bolt of Heaven.

MARTIN (*attempting to rise*).

Let me begone.

CONRAD (*detaining him*).

Whither now, Martin?

MARTIN.

To mass.

FIRST MEMBER.

Even now, we heard a tale of a villain, who, ungrateful as the frozen adder, stung the bosom that had warmed him into life.

MARTIN.

Conrad, bear me off ; I would be away from these men.

CONRAD.

Be at ease, and strive to sleep.

MARTIN.

Too well I know—I shall never sleep again.

SECOND MEMBER.

The wretch of whom we speak became, from revenge and lust of gain, the murderer of the master whose bread he did eat.

WICKERD.

Out upon the monster!

FIRST MEMBER.

For nearly thirty years was he permitted to cumber the ground. The miscreant thought his crime was concealed; but the earth which groaned under his footsteps—the winds which passed over his unhallowed head—the stream which he polluted by his lips—the fire at which he warmed his blood-stained hands—every element bore witness to his guilt.

MARTIN.

Conrad, good youth—lead me from hence, and I will show thee where, thirty years since, I deposited a mighty bribe. [Rises.

CONRAD.

Be patient, good Martin.

WICKERD.

And where was the miscreant seized?

[The two Members suddenly lay hands on MARTIN, and draw their daggers; the soldiers spring to their arms.]

FIRST MEMBER.

On this very spot.

WICKERD.

Traitors, unloose your hold !

FIRST MEMBER.

In the name of the Invisible Judges, I charge
ye, impede us not in our duty.

[All sink their weapons, and stand motionless.]

MARTIN.

Help ! help !

FIRST MEMBER.

Help him with your prayers.

[He is dragged off. The scene shuts.]

ACT V.

SCENE I.

The subterranean Chapel of the Castle of Griefenhaus. It seems deserted, and in decay. There are four entrances, each defended by an iron portal. At each door stands a warder clothed in black, and masked, armed with a naked sword. During the whole scene they remain motionless on their posts. In the centre of the chapel is the ruinous altar, half sunk in the ground, on which lie a large book, a dagger, and a coil of ropes, beside two lighted tapers. Antique stone benches of different heights around the chapel. In the back scene is seen a dilapidated entrance into the sacristy, which is quite dark.

Various Members of the Invisible Tribunal enter by the four different doors of the chapel. Each whispers something as he passes the Warder, which is answered by an inclination of the head. The costume of the Members is a long black robe, capable of muffling the face: some wear it in this man-

ner; others have their faces uncovered, unless on the entrance of a stranger: they place themselves in profound silence upon the stone benches.

Enter COUNT RODERIC, dressed in a scarlet cloak of the same form with those of the other Members. He takes his place on the most elevated bench.

RODERIC.

Warders, secure the doors! (*The doors are barred with great care.*)

RODERIC.

Herald, do thy duty!

[*Members all rise—Herald stands by the altar.*]

HERALD.

Members of the Invisible Tribunal, who judge in secret, and avenge in secret, like the Deity, are your hearts free from malice, and your hands from blood-guiltiness?

[*All the Members incline their heads.*]

RODERIC.

God pardon our sins of ignorance, and preserve us from those of presumption.

[*Again the Members solemnly incline their heads.*]

HERALD.

To the east, and to the west, and to the north, and to the south, I raise my voice; wherever there is treason, wherever there is blood-guiltiness, wherever there is sacrilege, sorcery, robbery, or perjury, there let this curse alight, and pierce the marrow and the bone. Raise, then, your voices, and say with me, wo! wo unto offenders!

ALL.

Wo! wo!

[*Members sit down.*]

HERALD.

He who knoweth of an unpunished crime, let him stand forth as bound by his oath when his hand was laid upon the dagger and upon the cord, and call to the assembly for vengeance!

MEMBER (*rises, his face covered*).

Vengeance! vengeance! vengeance!

RODERIC.

Upon whom dost thou invoke vengeance?

ACCUSER.

Upon a brother of this order, who is forsworn and perjured to its laws.

RODERIC.

Relate his crime.

ACCUSER.

This perjured brother was sworn, upon the steel and upon the cord, to denounce malefactors to the judgment-seat, from the four quarters of heaven, though it were the spouse of his heart, or the son whom he loved as the apple of his eye: yet did he conceal the guilt of one who was dear unto him; he folded up the crime from the knowledge of the tribunal; he removed the evidence of guilt, and withdrew the criminal from justice. What does his perjury deserve?

RODERIC.

Accuser, come before the altar; lay thy hand upon the dagger and the cord, and swear to the truth of thy accusation.

ACCUSER (*his hand on the altar*).

I swear!

RODERIC.

Wilt thou take upon thyself the penalty of perjury, should it be found false?

ACCUSER.

I will.

RODERIC.

Brethren, what is your sentence?

[*The Members confer a moment in whispers—
a silence.*]

ELDEST MEMBER.

Our voice is, that the perjured brother merits death.

RODERIC.

Accuser, thou hast heard the voice of the assembly; name the criminal.

ACCUSER.

George, Baron of Aspen.

[*A murmur in the assembly.*]

A MEMBER (*suddenly rising*).

I am ready, according to our holy laws, to swear, by the steel and the cord, that George of Aspen merits not this accusation, and that it is a foul calumny.

ACCUSER.

Rash man! gagest thou an oath so lightly?

MEMBER.

I gage it not lightly. I proffer it in the cause of innocence and virtue.

ACCUSER.

What if George of Aspen should not himself deny the charge?

MEMBER.

Then would I never trust man again.

ACCUSER.

Hear him, then, bear witness against himself
(*throws back his mantle*).

RODERIC.

Baron George of Aspen?

GEORGE.

The same — prepared to do penance for the crime of which he stands self-accused.

RODERIC.

Still, canst thou disclose the name of the criminal whom thou hast rescued from justice; on that condition alone, thy brethren may save thy life.

GEORGE.

Thinkest thou I would betray for the safety of my life, a secret I have preserved at the breach of my word?—No! I have weighed the value of my obligation—I will not discharge it—but most willingly will I pay the penalty!

RODERIC.

Retire, George of Aspen, till the assembly pronounce judgment.

GEORGE.

Welcome be your sentence—I am weary of your yoke of iron. A light beams on my soul. Wo to those who seek justice in the dark haunts of mystery and of cruelty! She dwells in the broad blaze of the sun, and Mercy is ever by her side. Wo

to those who would advance the general weal by trampling upon the social affections! they aspire to be more than men—they shall become worse than tigers. I go: better for me your altars should be stained with my blood, than my soul blackened with your crimes.

[*Exit GEORGE, by the ruinous door in the back scene, into the sacristy.*]

RODERIC.

Brethren, sworn upon the steel and upon the cord, to judge and to avenge in secret, without favour and without pity, what is your judgment upon George of Aspen, self-accused of perjury, and resistance to the laws of our fraternity.

[*Long and earnest murmurs in the assembly.*]

RODERIC.

Speak your doom.

ELDEST MEMBER.

George of Aspen has declared himself perjured;—the penalty of perjury is death!

RODERIC.

Father of the secret judges—Eldest among those who avenge in secret—take to thee the steel and the cord;—let the guilty no longer cumber the land.

ELDEST MEMBER.

I am fourscore and eight years old. My eyes are dim, and my hand is feeble; soon shall I be called before the throne of my Creator;—How shall I stand there, stained with the blood of such a man?

RODERIC.

How wilt thou stand before that throne, loaded with the guilt of a broken oath? The blood of the criminal be upon us and ours!

ELDEST MEMBER.

So be it, in the name of God!

[He takes the dagger from the altar, goes slowly towards the back scene, and reluctantly enters the sacristy.]

ELDEST JUDGE *(from behind the scene)*.

Dost thou forgive me?

GEORGE *(behind)*.

I do! *(He is heard to fall heavily.)*

[Re-enter the old judge from the sacristy. He lays on the altar the bloody dagger.]

RODERIC.

Hast thou done thy duty?

ELDEST MEMBER.

I have. *(He faints.)*

RODERIC.

He swoons. Remove him.

[He is assisted off the stage. During this four members enter the sacristy, and bring out a bier covered with a pall, which they place on the steps of the altar. A deep silence.]

RODERIC.

Judges of evil, dooming in secret, and avenging in secret, like the Deity: God keep your thoughts from evil, and your hands from guilt.

BERTRAM.

I raise my voice in this assembly, and cry, Vengeance! vengeance! vengeance!

RODERIC.

Enough has this night been done—(*he rises and brings BERTRAM forward.*) Think what thou doest—George has fallen—it were murder to slay both mother and son.

BERTRAM.

George of Aspen was thy victim—a sacrifice to thy hatred and envy. I claim mine, sacred to justice and to my murdered brother. Resume thy place!—thou canst not stop the rock thou hast put in motion.

RODERIC (*resumes his seat*).

Upon whom callest thou for vengeance?

BERTRAM.

Upon Isabella of Aspen.

RODERIC.

She has been summoned.

HERALD.

Isabella of Aspen, accused of murder by poison, I charge thee to appear, and stand upon thy defence.

[*Three knocks are heard at one of the doors—it is opened by the warder.*]

[*Enter ISABELLA, the veil still wrapped around her head, led by her conductor. All the members muffle their faces.*]

RODERIC.

Uncover her eyes.

[*The veil is removed. ISABELLA looks wildly round.*]

RODERIC.

Knowest thou, lady, where thou art?

ISABELLA.

I guess.

RODERIC.

Say thy guess.

ISABELLA.

Before the Avengers of blood.

RODERIC.

Knowest thou why thou art called to their presence?

ISABELLA.

No.

RODERIC.

Speak, accuser.

BERTRAM.

I impeach thee, Isabella of Aspen, before this awful assembly, of having murdered privily and by poison, Arnolph of Ebersdorf, thy first husband.

RODERIC.

Canst thou swear to the accusation?

BERTRAM (*his hand on the altar*).

I lay my hand on the steel and the cord, and swear.

RODERIC.

Isabella of Aspen, thou hast heard thy accusation. What canst thou answer?

ISABELLA.

That the oath of an accuser is no proof of guilt!

RODERIC.

Hast thou more to say?

ISABELLA.

I have.

RODERIC.

Speak on.

ISABELLA.

Judges invisible to the sun, and seen only by the stars of midnight! I stand before you, accused of an enormous, daring, and premeditated crime. I was married to Arnolf when I was only eighteen years old. Arnolf was wary and jealous; ever suspecting me without a cause, unless it was because he had injured me. How then should I plan and perpetrate such a deed? The lamb turns not against the wolf, though a prisoner in his den.

RODERIC.

Have you finished?

ISABELLA.

A moment. Years after years have elapsed without a whisper of this foul suspicion. Arnold left a brother! though common fame had been silent, natural affection would have been heard against me—why spoke he not my accusation? Or has my conduct justified this horrible charge? No! awful judges, I may answer, I have founded cloisters, I have endowed hospitals. The goods that Heaven bestowed on me, I have not held back from the needy. I appeal to you, judges of evil, can these proofs of innocence be down-weighed

by the assertion of an unknown and disguised, perchance a malignant accuser?

BERTRAM.

No longer will I wear that disguise (*throws back his mantle*). Dost thou know me now?

ISABELLA.

Yes; I know thee for a wandering minstrel, relieved by the charity of my husband.

BERTRAM.

No, traitress! know me for Bertram of Ebersdorf, brother to him thou didst murder. Call her accomplice Martin. Ha! turn'st thou pale?

ISABELLA.

May I have some water?—(*Apart.*) Sacred Heaven! his vindictive look is so like—

[*Water is brought.*]

A MEMBER.

Martin died in the hands of our brethren.

RODERIC.

Dost thou know the accuser, lady?

ISABELLA (*reassuming fortitude*).

Let not the sinking of nature under this dreadful trial be imputed to the consciousness of guilt. I do know the accuser—know him to be outlawed for homicide, and under the ban of the empire: his testimony cannot be received.

ELDEST JUDGE.

She says truly.

BERTRAM (*to RODERIC*).

Then I call upon thee and William of Wolfstein to bear witness to what you know.

RODERIC.

Wolfstein is not in the assembly, and my place prevents me from being a witness.

BERTRAM.

Then will I call another: meanwhile, let the accused be removed.

RODERIC.

Retire, lady. [ISABELLA is led to the sacristy.]

ISABELLA (*in going off*).

The ground is slippery—Heavens! it is floated with blood! [Exit into the sacristy.]

RODERIC (*apart to* BERTRAM).

Whom dost thou mean to call?

[BERTRAM whispers.]

RODERIC.

This goes beyond me. (*After a moment's thought.*) But be it so. Maltingen shall behold Aspen humbled in the dust. (*Aloud.*) Brethren, the accuser calls for a witness who remains without: admit him. [All muffle their faces.]

Enter RUDIGER, *his eyes bound or covered, leaning upon two members; they place a stool for him, and unbind his eyes.*

RODERIC.

Knowest thou where thou art, and before whom?

RUDIGER.

I know not, and I care not. Two strangers summoned me from my castle to assist, they said, at a

great act of justice. I ascended the litter they brought, and I am here.

RODERIC.

It regards the punishment of perjury and the discovery of murder. Art thou willing to assist us?

RUDIGER.

Most willingly, as is my duty.

RODERIC.

What if the crime regard thy friend?

RUDIGER.

I will hold him no longer so.

RODERIC.

What if thine own blood?

RUDIGER.

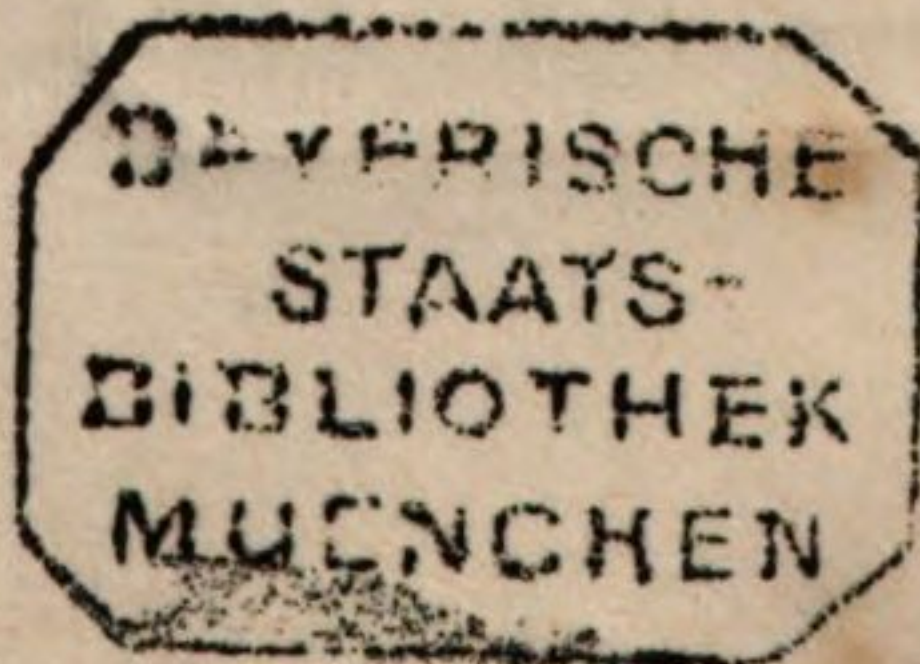
I would let it out with my poniard.

RODERIC.

Then canst thou not blame us for this deed of justice. Remove the pall. (*The pall is lifted, beneath which is discovered the body of GEORGE pale and bloody. RUDIGER staggers towards it.*)

RUDIGER.

My George! my George! Not slain manly in battle, but murdered by legal assassins. Much, much may I mourn thee, my beloved boy; but not now—not now: never will I shed a tear for thy death till I have cleared thy fame.—Hear me, ye midnight murderers; he was innocent (*raising his voice*)—upright as the truth itself. Let the man who dares gainsay me lift that gage. If the Almighty does not strengthen these frail limbs, to make good a father's quarrel, I have a son left,



who will vindicate the honour of Aspen, or lay his bloody body beside his brother's.

RODERIC.

Rash and insensate! Hear first the cause. Hear the dishonour of thy house.

ISABELLA (*from the sacristy*).

Never shall he hear it till the author is no more! (*RUDIGER attempts to rush towards the sacristy, but is prevented. ISABELLA enters wounded, and throws herself on GEORGE'S body.*)

ISABELLA.

Murdered for me—for me! my dear, dear son!

RUDIGER (*still held*).

Cowardly villains, let me loose! Maltingen, this is thy doing! Thy face thou wouldst disguise, thy deeds thou canst not! I defy thee to instant and mortal combat!

ISABELLA (*looking up*).

No! no! endanger not thy life! Myself! myself! I could not bear thou shouldst know— —Oh! (*Dies.*)

RUDIGER.

Oh! let me go—let me but try to stop her blood, and I will forgive all.

RODERIC.

Drag him off and detain him. The voice of lamentation must not disturb the stern deliberation of justice.

RUDIGER.

Bloodhound of Maltingen! Well beseems thee thy base revenge! The marks of my son's lance

are still on thy craven crest! Vengeance on the band of ye!

[*RUDIGER is dragged off to the sacristy.*

RODERIC.

Brethren, we stand discovered! What is to be done to him who shall descry our mystery?

ELDEST JUDGE.

He must become a brother of our order, or die!

RODERIC.

This man will never join us! He cannot put his hand into ours, which are stained with the blood of his wife and son: he must therefore die! (*Murmurs in the assembly.*) Brethren! I wonder not at your reluctance; but the man is powerful, has friends and allies to buckler his cause. It is over with us, and with our order, unless the laws are obeyed. (*Fainter murmurs.*) Besides, have we not sworn a deadly oath to execute these statutes? (*A dead silence.*) Take to thee the steel and the cord (*to the eldest judge*).

ELDEST JUDGE.

He has done no evil—he was the companion of my battle—I will not!

RODERIC (*to another*).

Do thou—and succeed to the rank of him who has disobeyed. Remember your oath! (*Member takes the dagger, and goes irresolutely forward; looks into the sacristy, and comes back.*)

MEMBER.

He has fainted—fainted in anguish for his wife and his son: the bloody ground is strewn with his white hairs, torn by those hands that have

fought for Christendom. I will not be your butcher.—(*Throws down the dagger.*)

BERTRAM.

Irresolute and perjured! the robber of my inheritance, the author of my exile, shall die!

RODERIC.

Thanks, Bertram. Execute the doom—secure the safety of the holy tribunal!

[BERTRAM seizes the dagger, and is about to rush into the sacristy, when three loud knocks are heard at the door.]

ALL.

Hold! Hold!

[*The Duke of BAVARIA, attended by many members of the Invisible Tribunal, enters, dressed in a scarlet mantle trimmed with ermine, and wearing a ducal crown.—He carries a rod in his hand.—All rise.—A murmur among the members, who whisper to each other, « The Duke,» « The Chief,» etc.*]

RODERIC.

The Duke of Bavaria. I am lost.

DUKE (*sees the bodies*).

I am too late—the victims have fallen.

HENRY (*who enters with the Duke*).

Gracious Heaven! O George!

RUDIGER (*from the sacristy*).

Henry—it is thy voice—save me!

[HENRY rushes into the sacristy.]

DUKE.

Roderic of Maltingen, descend from the seat which thou hast dishonoured—(RODERIC leaves his

place, which the Duke occupies).—Thou standest accused of having perverted the laws of our order; for that, being a mortal enemy to the House of Aspen, thou hast abused thy sacred authority to pander to thy private revenge; and to this Wolfstein has been witness.

RODERIC.

Chief among our circles, I have but acted according to our laws.

DUKE.

Thou hast indeed observed the letter of our statutes, and wo am I that they do warrant this night's bloody work! I cannot do unto thee as I would, but what I can I will. Thou hast not indeed transgressed our law, but thou hast wrested and abused it: kneel down, therefore, and place thy hands betwixt mine (*RODERIC kneels as directed*). I degrade thee from thy sacred office (*spreads his hands, as pushing RODERIC from him*). If after two days thou darest to pollute Bavarian ground by thy footsteps, be it at the peril of the steel and the cord (*RODERIC rises*). I dissolve this meeting (*all rise*). Judges and condemners of others, God teach you knowledge of yourselves! (*All bend their heads—Duke breaks his rod, and comes forward.*)

RODERIC.

Lord Duke, thou hast charged me with treachery—thou art my liege lord—but who else dares maintain the accusation, lies in his throat.

HENRY (*rushing from the sacristy*).

Villain! I accept thy challenge!

RODERIC.

Vain boy! my lance shall chastise thee in the lists—there lies my gage.

DUKE.

Henry, on thy allegiance, touch it not. (*To Roderic.*) Lists shalt thou never more enter; lance shalt thou never more wield (*draws his sword*). With this sword wast thou dubbed a knight; with this sword I dishonour thee—I thy prince—(*strikes him slightly with the flat of the sword*)—I take from thee the degree of knight, the dignity of chivalry. Thou art no longer a free German noble; thou art honourless and rightless; the funeral obsequies shall be performed for thee as for one dead to knightly honour and to fair fame; thy spurs shall be hacked from thy heels; thy arms baffled and reversed by the common executioner. Go, fraudulent and dishonoured, hide thy shame in a foreign land! (*Roderic shows a dumb expression of rage.*) Lay hands on Bertram of Ebersdorf: as I live, he shall pay the forfeiture of his outlawry. Henry, aid us to remove thy father from this charnel-house. Never shall he know the dreadful secret. Be it mine to sooth his sorrows, and to restore the honour of the House of Aspen.

(*Curtain slowly falls.*)





Scott, Walter,

The House of Aspen a tragedy

Paris 1830

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